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ABSTRACT

The European Community (EC) openly supports use and maintenance of the major languages of its countries. One idea behind this support is not to privilege any language of the community, but to encourage the unique features of each member state. This policy carries over into support for diversified language instruction; rather than promote one or two languages, all official languages, plus Irish and Lutzburgesch, are to be taught. The goals are both proficiency and communicative competence. However, this policy has been difficult to implement because English dominates among EC officials as well as in many other domains. In education, English is one of the two languages chosen or required in most member countries. Increasing interdependence among members makes the role of this language an important issue. English is used for communication both within and outside Europe, and some aspects of EC policy encourage English usage. Language policy and practice, then, appear to be in conflict, and policy should be changed to reflect the reality of widespread English use. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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The Role of English in Europe: EIL or EFL?

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout Europe English is officially characterized as a foreign language. This classification has implications for the way English is taught in schools and reflects assumptions about how English is learned and about the possibility of contact with native speakers and texts. English has also been identified as a means of international communication, as an EIL. This characterization also has implications for language pedagogy and learning. But are these the only roles that English plays in Europe? What about its status in a post 1992 unified and integrated Europe? Given this status, which language policy will best address the realities of a multilingual and multicultural European Community? What approach to language teaching can best respond to the needs of European learners?

This paper explores the policy and practice of English in the European Community and raises some questions that bear consideration with respect to policy and pedagogy as English evolves as an EC language. Integral to this exploration is consideration of the appropriateness of identifying English as a foreign and international language in the European context.

LANGUAGE POLICIES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

A recent document published by the EC summarizes the Community's position on language:

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> The Community regards language as an expression of the identity of people. It is the key to understanding their culture, customs and aspirations. Language is a cohesive force in a community and just as science and technology have come to pervade every aspect of human living, so the questions of languages pervades all the ambitions, intentions and policies of the European Community (CEC, 1991a: 1).

In keeping with this view, all official EC policies support the use and maintenance of the major languages of the community (Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish; some policies include Irish and Letzeburgesch). One idea behind this support is not to privilege any language of the Community, but to encourage the unique features of each member state (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain). The EC goes to considerable expense to implement this policy, spending large sums annually for translations of documents and correspondence and the services of interpreters for meetings and other official functions.

EC policy also carries over into Community support for language instruction. In 1989 funds were allocated to support the LINGUA program, which helps to fund scholarships, exchanges and teaching aids aimed at improving the quantity and quality of the language preparation given to the citizens of EC member states (CEC, 1991b: 5). The language strategy associated with this program is one of diversification of languages offered. Rather than promote one or two of the priority languages, all official languages of the Community should be taught together with Irish and Letzeburgesch. The goals of the teaching are proficiency as well as communicative competence. Learners are to get to

know the culture, customs and aspirations of the native speakers of the language and to develop communicative skills in interacting with them (CEC, 1991a: 2).

However, the ideal of the EC's position is difficult to maintain even within the language practices of Community officials, who have been criticized as being poor examples of the diversity the policy espouses (Zapp, 1979). Even with respect to the EC's two working languages, English and French, it is difficult to be consistent with policy. For example, use of French in particular has become less common in the European Parliament and Commission, especially in departments concerned with financial and technology-related issues, and is being pushed aside by use of English (van Els and Extra, 1987).

And it is not only among EC officials that English is dominant. Several studies show that English plays a significant role in many domains, among them business, tourism, science, technology, the media, advertising, entertainment (see e.g., Berns, 1988, 1990; Denison, 1981; Flaitz, 1988). This role is not relegated to that of lexical borrowings: English also is the lingua franca of communication between citizens of Europe in professional and personal interaction. English is used by Dutch and Italians with one another to get things done as well as to express ideas, thoughts and feelings that are uniquely European and represent European ways of doing, thinking and being. Thus, English is not only used for communication with native speakers.

Insight into the status of English can also be gained by considering its place in the educational system. The Community recommends that schools teach not less than two languages, and various EC countries have declared their intent to make at least two foreign languages available

to all citizens. Such national policies it is believed would contribute to a more unified Europe and give some attention to the so-called "small" languages, e.g., Dutch and Danish. Additionally, these language proposals address the fear that English will possibly be the only foreign language that a majority of Europeans would ever learn (van Els and Extra, 1987: 108).

While these policies provide for learning of languages other than English, English is one of the two languages chosen or required in most if not all EC countries. Already in the 1983-84 school year, 87% of European school age children chose to study English as their first foreign language. In a number of secondary school systems in Europe, English is a compulsory subject. In 1979, in what was at that time West Germany, approximately 98% of school age learners, in vocational as well as general education tracks, learned English. In France, English clearly has a monopoly position, even in schools where pupils and parents have free choice among languages: 81% learn English as the first foreign language in school; 16% learn German, 3% Spanish, and another .5% learn Italian or Russian. In the Netherlands, English is a compulsory foreign language in elementary school. And many university students throughout Europe want to study in an English speaking country, with the United States being popular especially in the fields of business, tourism, communications, engineering, and advertising (Hopkins, 1991). It is interesting to contrast this enthusiasm on the continent for learning additional languages with the situation in Great Britain, where more than three-fourths of secondary school pupils drop foreign languages as a subject within 2-3 years of taking it up (Van Els and Extra, 1987: 112).

EUROPE AS A LINGUISTIC AREA: EFL and/or EIL

Before looking more closely at the question of "EFL or EIL?", some characterization of the European Community as a linguistic area is needed.

We are accustomed to thinking of the 12 member countries separately, as countries with separate languages and cultures. However, with the implementation of the economic integration of the Community scheduled for the end of 1992, 12 western European countries will begin to move toward the Community's declared objective of full union. As such the EC increasingly will be perceived as an interdependent unit and, it is expected, more attention will be given to the notion of a European culture and identity as well (see Wistrich, 1991, Chapter 6, for discussion). This unity has implications for the way the EC and the role of English within it can be viewed sociolinguistically.

Because there is considerable similarity in patterns of use of English, exposure to English, and national language policies among EC member states, it is possible, in my view, to talk about the Community as a unit, as one would about multilingual countries, such as India (and many ~~of its~~ EC policies and practices encourage such an interpretation). One important difference in the EC is the membership of two states, Great Britain and Ireland, which have English, the dominant language of Community communication, as their official, native language. In EC policy, Great Britain and Ireland are equal partners of the other ten. In the terms of Kachru's concentric circle model (Kachru 1985: see handout), the EC can be described as a federation of inner circle and expanding circle countries. This situation is a challenge ~~to anyone~~ when drawing up a sociolinguistic description or profile of English in Europe. How to describe the role English in the EC?

EFL generally refers to a setting where English is not one of the vernaculars of the country or region in which it is taught. It is taught with reference to a speech community outside national or territorial boundaries. It is usually learned primarily through formal instruction with lack of environmental support, that is, it cannot be "picked up". If we ~~accept that~~ Consider the twelve member states of the EC as a unit, it is difficult to apply the classification "FL" to English because it is one of the vernaculars of a member state. The referent speech community of Great Britain is not outside the boundaries of the Community, but inside. Can we continue to speak of English as being learned for "external purposes", as a foreign language when Great Britain and Ireland are now internal to the EC?

The lack or presence of environmental support is also a criterion given for determining whether or not a language is taught as a foreign language. Already prior to unification, some EC countries, such as Germany, have been exposed to a great deal of English through media and contact with English speakers, both native and non-native. What is the potential influence for richer environmental support when an inner circle country and expanding circle countries are united? What will happen when citizens of member states have even more contact through exchanges and increased contact through business and tourism? Will it still be possible to speak of English strictly as an FL? Might there even be the possibility of English becoming recognized as a second language?

The notion that English is learned and used only as an international language is also called into question if Europe is regarded as a unit. Europeans do use English for communication outside the boundaries of the twelve EC member states; they communicate for example with Africans,

Asians, or North Americans, who do not speak Spanish, or French, or Danish or any other of the continental EC languages. In this sense English is an international language.

International language is often contrasted with intranational language, with the latter referring to using and learning English for wider communication within a country, particularly for educational, commercial and political purposes. While the unified Europe is not a nation and it is not completely accurate to speak of English in this context as an intranational language, it also has to be recognized that English is a language of communication within Europe, as an intra-European language, if you will. Its function as a language of wider communication for educational, commercial and political purposes is well established beyond Europe. This function is strengthened through the EC in a number of ways. One is by the policies of the EC concerning the use of English as an official EC language. Another is the use of English within the EC for the educational purposes of exchange programs, such as the European Community Action Scheme for Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS), whose participants study in member states where English is the medium of instruction, e.g, in Great Britain or in some universities in Greece.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

What does all this mean for English language teaching in the EC? How to interpret this information? In my view, language policy and practice with respect to English are in conflict in Europe. Such mismatches are of course are nothing new; they are common wherever agencies, institutions, or government offices are involved in regulating human activity. This particular mismatch is of consequence however because it has an impact on the success of communication within EC member states,

of their educational programs, and of the ultimate success of the unification of Europe.

Officially English is a foreign language and is equal to the eight other languages. The social reality is that English is not equal. It dominates. And this status is not likely to change soon. EC policy seeks to diminish the impact of English and to discourage its spread as the lingua franca. Public school English class enrollments do not support these efforts. English is to be taught for the purpose of increasing knowledge about the culture, customs, and beliefs of the native speakers. But non-native English speaking continental Europeans are using English to express their culture, customs and beliefs to one another.

This sociolinguistic description of English in Europe has particular relevance for the language teaching professional's task of curriculum design. Traditionally a didactic approach has been taken to curriculum design and language instruction in Europe. This approach is based on the assumptions (a) that everyone learns English in order to interact with native speakers of an inner circle country, especially England or the United States, (b) that English is inextricably linked to the culture of England or the United States, and (c) that learning English means dealing with the realities of England or the United States or with British or American ways of doing, thinking or being. One of the problems with this approach is that it puts a misplaced emphasis on native-like mastery and methodological matters, while ignoring sociolinguistic issues of which communicative competence learners are to develop, the degree of international mutual intelligibility they are to achieve, or the model of language appropriate for them to approximate.

Since a didactic approach does not match the realities of English language learning and use in Europe, a pragmatic approach seems more appropriate. Such an approach responds to current demands for using and learning English as an international and intra- European language. Most importantly it acknowledges that English is not only the language of Americans, Britons, New Zealanders, Australians or Canadians, but that it is also a language of Europeans. The context of the language presented in materials can not be restricted to native speaker settings. The learners also need to be prepared to be users of English for their own purposes, which may or may not include interacting with native speakers. A shift from a didactic to pragmatic approach means breaking away from viewing English as the language of "the native speaker" and preparing learners throughout the EC for use of English as their language too. (See Berns, in press, for more extensive discussion and Leguetke and Thomas (1991) for means of implementing a pragmatic approach.)

CONCLUSION

The most appropriate response to the needs of learners begins with an examination of the social realities and roles of English in Europe. English is a language of Europeans, and it is clearly more than a foreign or international language; its role does not compare to that of other foreign languages such as Danish or Dutch, for example. Language policy that insists upon these limited roles for English may make good politics, but does not ensure "good" English language teaching or the attainment of the goal of increased communication among EC member states. The shift from a didactic to pragmatic approach to language teaching can take place and have the desired effect of developing a generation of effective communicators only when policies and practice are consistent with the patterns of English use among Europeans.

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English in Europe
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EC Member States
Belgium
Denmark
France
Germany
Great Britain
Greece
Ireland
Italy
Luxembourg
the Netherlands
Portugal
Spain

Major Languages

Danish
Dutch
English
French
German
Greek
Italian
Portuguese
Spanish

Concentric Circle Model of World Englishes
(Kachru 1985)